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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 MAPUTO 001257

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: THE CHANGING FACE OF ISLAM IN MOZAMBIQUE

Classified By: Classified by Charge Todd Chapman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: With a large Muslim minority, estimated to range between 20 and 40 percent of the total population, or 4 to 8 million adherents, the role of Islam and Muslims in Mozambique continues to grow in importance. Since the eighth century, Islam has developed along the Swahili coast in Mozambique, which has a larger Muslim population in absolute numbers than Tanzania, and a larger Muslim percentage of the population than Kenya. Though historically moderate, Islam in Mozambique is taking small steps towards conservatism, espoused largely by economically influential South Asian immigrants and newly-orthodox Mozambican students returning from formal Islamic, often Wahhabi, education in the Middle East. While this trend towards conservative religious practice marks a shift away from hybridized Sufi-inspired traditional Mozambican Islamic practices, there is no current concrete evidence that such a turn towards orthodoxy is accompanied by anti-Western extremist ideology, militancy, or violence. The South Asian community in Mozambique has been linked to illicit economic activity however, specifically in the areas of drugs, money laundering, and human trafficking. Overall, the appearance of more conservative Muslims reveals the absence of a monolithic Muslim community in Mozambique which continues to espouse a variety of religious and ritualistic diversity, as well as political differences. Our outreach efforts in recent years have included trips to the largely Muslim Northern provinces, Iftars during Ramadan, and regular meetings with Muslim leaders. Over the next five years, the \$507 million Millennium Challenge Compact will greatly enhance road and water infrastructure in traditionally Muslim areas in northern and central Mozambique, where the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Ambassador's Special Self Help Fund (SSH), and Public Affairs' ACCESS English language training also play important roles. END SUMMARY.

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SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS  
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12. (SBU) The most recent national census (from 1997) estimates that the Mozambican population is 20 percent Muslim, 44 percent Christian, and 33 percent Animist or no religion (Note: A census was conducted in 2007, but results have not yet been released. While many Muslims consider Islam to be the largest organized religion in Mozambique, some expect they will be undercounted. End note). There are four main groups of Muslims in Mozambique, the historic indigenous Sunni Mozambicans, and conservative South Asians of Pakistani and Indian descent, a small group of Sunni North African and

Middle Eastern immigrants, and a tiny population of some 500 Ismaili Shi'i followers of the Aga Khan. Though unlikely, Muslim leaders claim that Muslims represent as much as 40 percent of the population, particularly since most economic migrants to Mozambique tend to be Muslims of Pakistani or Indian descent. Nonetheless, recent immigrants combined with an aggressive conversion strategy in the rural areas of the northern and central provinces, including the construction of numerous mosques financed by international Muslim groups, has helped Islam expand and penetrate traditionally animist areas in the interior. The three northernmost provinces of Niassa, Cabo Delgado, and Nampula are predominately Muslim, owing to centuries of contact with Arab, Persian, and Indian traders. Varying sources put the Muslim population in these provinces between 60-80 percent, and up to 95 percent in coastal areas. Since the end of colonialism, important Muslim communities have been established in the southern part of the country, especially in Maputo and Matola.

13. (SBU) In general, approximately one-third of Muslims are strict followers (they observe daily prayers, do not drink alcohol, and fast during the holy month of Ramadan), while the remaining two-thirds are nominally Muslims. Sunnis in the Northern provinces can be loosely grouped into those who mix Islam with traditional African beliefs, those who follow the Sufi orders, and those who follow a more strict interpretation of the Koran. The Sunni in the Southern provinces are more recently established and generally adhere to a more strict interpretation of the Koran. While African Muslims have made important inroads in recent years, most imams remain of South Asian descent, owing to the

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historically important political and leadership positions South Asians occupied during Portuguese colonial rule, allowing them greater access to education.

14. (C) Porous borders and a 1,534 mile coastline (nearly twice the size of California's 840 mile coastline) have contributed to an influx of economic immigrants since the end of the civil war in 1992. The National Director for Migration confirms that the vast majority of new immigration stems from countries with large or majority Muslim countries such as Pakistan and India, with lesser numbers from Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Senegal. While some of these immigrants use Mozambique as a transit point on the way to South Africa and eventually Europe, many remain, buying small businesses in Mozambique, particularly in the cities of Nampula and Pemba in the North and Maputo in the South. These groups bring their own religious traditions, and while some practice a more conservative interpretation of the Koran, others are more interested in establishing business linkages.

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THE GREAT ORTHODOXY DEBATE  
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15. (SBU) Islam has undergone numerous iterations since its establishment in Northern Mozambique prior to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498. Today, several groups are involved in a largely peaceful internal debate concerning Islamic authority and orthodoxy in Mozambique. Far removed from the base of Islam in the Middle East, Mozambican Muslims in the north developed a more syncretistic form of Islam, which included traditional African rituals, dances, and spiritualism. Another major influence in this region was the Sufi orders, which arrived in the Northern provinces in the early 1900s. These versions of Islam clashed more over local clan power than doctrine and remained dominant throughout the colonial period. The seemingly non-political nature of the Muslim center in the north contributed to a period of stagnation, particularly as the Portuguese forcibly converted many to Christianity.

16. (SBU) During the late colonial period and lasting into the

years immediately following independence, a new group of young Mozambican Muslims, which felt marginalized by the Portuguese and later the secular policies of the post-independence FRELIMO party, emerged to challenge the northern Islamic establishment. This group of Islamists (Wahhabis) was lead by men who had studied Islam in such places as Saudi Arabia, India, Iran, and Sudan, and advocated fundamentalist theories calling for a return to the roots of Islam. In general, the Islamists supported a literal interpretation of the Koran and a more conservative lifestyle, but specifically they sought to supplant the northern Muslims as the Islamic authority in Mozambique. Since the early 1980s, this "division" has become more formalized with the official creation of an Islamic Council, made up largely of Islamists, and African Muslims, and an Islamic Congress, comprised mostly of Sufis and African traditionalist Muslims from the north.

17. (C) Divisions between the two groups largely center on doctrine and ritual practices. For example, while members of the Congress want recognition of their identity and long-standing Muslim tradition, Islamists in the Council target for "correction" certain rituals associated with the Congress, such as Sufi-inspired saint veneration, funeral rites, celebration of the Prophet's birthday, and the proper time to celebrate the end of Ramadan. The Congress still has a large numerical advantage, but this appears to be slowly changing. Unlike the Council, the Congress receives very little international funding to support construction of mosques and madrassas. In addition, Congress members receiving scholarships to study Islam abroad often return as more radicalized Islamists and join the Council instead of the Congress. Also, recent Muslim immigrants tend to be more conservative adherents and therefore join the Council. It is also important to note that within the Council itself there have been divisions, especially involving race: while most of the leadership are South Asian Mozambicans, the majority of members are African. A growing number of African members of the Council are receiving a rigorous religious education, but until recently many were relegated to inferior positions in

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the leadership structures, mosques, and madrassas.

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POLITICAL PATTERNS  
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18. (C) Muslims have become a growing political force in recent elections, particularly as their allegiances have proven malleable. During the early post-independence years, Muslims largely were cast-off as colonial sympathizers by the mostly Christian and animist (but also Marxist) FRELIMO. The early, strongly secularist tilt of FRELIMO in these years also allowed the opposition RENAMO to attract many Muslims to their cause in the name of religious freedom. For this reason, northern Muslims in large numbers voted for RENAMO in the country's first multi-party elections in 1994. Perhaps realizing the potential of this growing voting bloc, FRELIMO made several overtures to Muslims, beginning with helping to establish the Muslim Council and later by advocating for a national holiday to celebrate the Eid (Note: the latter ultimately failed, but demonstrated FRELIMO's "commitment." End Note). FRELIMO has continued to establish strong linkages with influential Muslim businessmen, some of whom have served in the National Assembly as FRELIMO deputies. This outreach strategy appears to have paid dividends: Muslims, particularly in the coastal areas of Nampula province, voted in lower numbers for RENAMO in both the 1999 and 2004 national elections, and are no longer a reliable voting bloc for RENAMO. In the November 19 municipal elections, FRELIMO again dominated historically Muslim and historically RENAMO areas.

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USG OUTREACH EFFORTS

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¶9. (C) Muslim outreach is an integral part of our mission plan, and we apply several strategies to reach out to this important group, including concentrated efforts to recruit Muslims for exchange programs. Since 2002, the Chief of Mission has hosted an Iftar for important Muslim leaders, finding that while Muslim leaders were initially skeptical, the Iftar is viewed favorably by Muslims and is being replicated by other Western nations, such as Great Britain. Public Affairs continues to host Iftars, as well as films and debates on Muslim issues. Public Affairs has placed an English Language Fellow at Musa Bin Bique University, a private Muslim university which has an American Corner. We have also sought an ongoing dialogue with a broad range of Muslim leaders. While no one Muslim speaks for the diverse community as a whole, Sheik Aminuddin Mohamad, educated at al-Azhar, leader of the Muslim Council, Director of the Hamza Institute (a madrassa, mosque, and cultural center) and the only widely-published Muslim scholar in Portuguese, is the closest thing to a "Muslim authority" in Mozambique, and has become a regular Embassy contact. Sheik Aminuddin, with a weekly column in a national newspaper, is an older generation, moderate Islamist who, according to his writings, believes in a more literal interpretation of the Koran but tends to be politically conciliatory. He publicly distanced himself from Muslim extremism in the wake of 9/11, but has expressed concern that Muslims are still paying the price for the actions of a few.

¶10. (C) Aside from Iftars and regular dialogue with Muslim leaders such as Aminuddin, we sponsored the very well-received visit of an American Muslim Imam in 2004. The Embassy PolSpecialist, also a Muslim, recalls that the visit was so successful that the trip was extended by several days. Some leaders have expressed to the PolSpecialist their hope that a similar visit is forthcoming. We have also made Muslim outreach the focus of several trips to the north in recent years, meeting with religious, business, and community leaders. These trips are both an effort to remind the Muslim community that we recognize their importance as a social and religious group, and an effort to publicize in the Muslim community our work on health (HIV/AIDS, malaria) and education programs (funding computers) through PEPFAR and Special Self-Help projects. We will continue to publicize the importance of the Millennium Challenge Compact, which focuses the \$507 million on traditionally Muslim areas of the country. Finally, the small yet influential Public Affairs ACCESS English language program targets predominantly Muslim

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areas with funding for 100 students to study English and gain fluency over two years. Often, Muslim groups are pleasantly surprised at the ongoing programming directly benefiting Muslims, suggesting that continued public outreach would be beneficial.

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COMMENT: ENGAGEMENT THE KEY  
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¶11. (C) Mozambique is still a bastion of Muslim moderation and religious tolerance. Occurrences of inter-religious tension are rare, but circumstances could be altered by a variety of factors. The majority of Muslims are poor, young, Africans in the north, while the economic power structures in Mozambique tend to be South Asian and located in the South. International agencies, such as the Wahhabi African Muslim Agency continue to fund the Islamic education of increasing numbers of young Mozambicans, who return with more orthodox views of Islam. Some of these also return with new ideas on how Islam is being affected by geopolitical issues, particularly the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the global war on terror. Also the influx of more conservative South Asian Muslims could eventually be an altering factor. Many Pakistanis enter illegally for stays of several months in

order to teach in madrassas or visit northern communities as missionaries. For now, however, there is little evidence of violent extremism, radicalization, or international politicization within the diverse Muslim community. This is a tribute to the current moderate leadership and the long tradition of peaceful religious coexistence.

¶12. (C) For now, there is little evidence of widespread violent extremism, radicalization, or international politicization within the diverse Muslim community. There do appear to be small pockets of extremist sympathizers within the conservative elements of the Muslim community, especially among the South Asian community. The affluent Arab and South Asian minorities also have isolated elements that lean toward sympathy for the international Jihad against the West within the Sunni Sect and Hizballah within the Shi'i Arab community. While small, these groups do have access to international NGO's of concern, though we lack sufficient information to know for sure what connections these groups may have that could indicate more direct ties to FTO's

¶13. (C) In the meantime, we are playing a leading role to ensure that Mozambique remains an example of Islamic moderation. Continued dialogue, including trips to the northern provinces and more frequent exchanges with American Muslims, can help us make further inroads with this growing community. This public outreach will ensure that the Muslim community is aware of the variety of programs directly benefiting them. A more difficult task will be ensuring that Muslims are not left behind, as southern Mozambique continues to outpace the rest of the country economically. The northern provinces lag behind in most development indicators, and if the GRM does not adequately address their needs, there may be a move towards radicalization based on a sense of disenfranchisement. For the time being, programs like Millennium Challenge Compact, PEPFAR, PMI, American Corner, and ACCESS are providing much needed support in the north and center, but further U.S. democracy/governance assistance should complement these health and infrastructure programs to place a higher priority on northern, less developed, Muslim-majority provinces as a way of ensuring that this important historical segment of the population remains moderate and friendly to the United States.  
Chapman